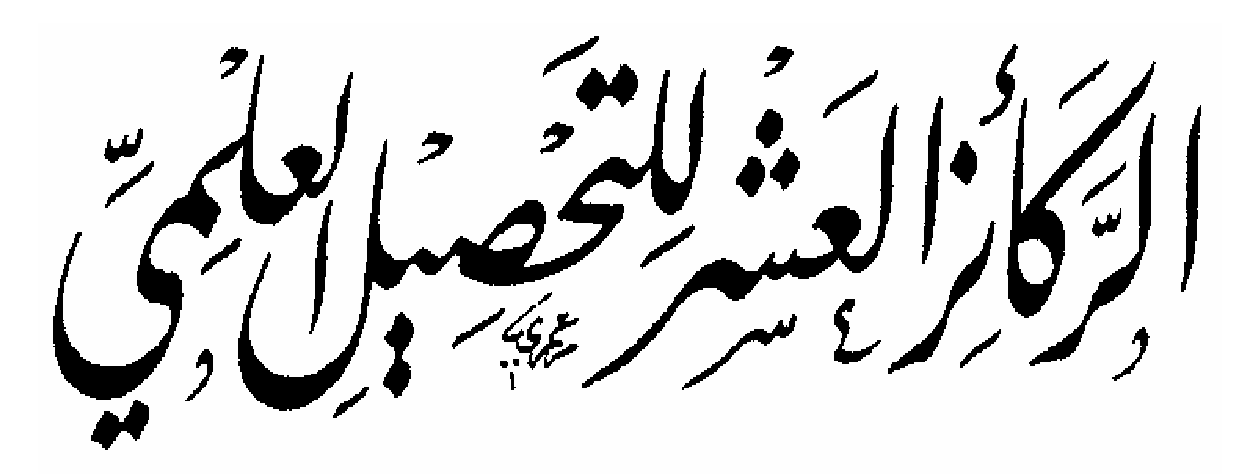




Ten Guidelines for Obtaining Knowledge

Written By:
'Abdullaah bin Salfeeq Adh-Dhufairee

Introduction By:
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About the Book: This book is a complete translation of a small booklet entitled: ***"Ar-Rakaa'iz-ul-'Ashar Lit-Tahseel-il-'Ilmee"*** (Ten Guidelines for Obtaining Knowledge) printed by Daar-ul-Minhaaj, 1st Edition, 2003.

In this short treatise, the author 'Abdullaah bin Salfeeq Adh-Dhufairee, presents concise advice to the seekers of knowledge in the format of ten simple guidelines. These guidelines cover characteristics and etiquettes that a student of knowledge should adorn himself with in order to obtain knowledge.

The treatise has been introduced and praised by Shaikh Ahmad An-Najmee, one of the elder scholars in Saudi Arabia, thus indicating its importance and benefit.

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Introduction from Shaikh Ahmad bin Yahyaa An-Najmee

All praise is for Allaah and may His peace and blessings be on the Messenger of Allaah, his family and Companions. To proceed:

Our brother in Islaam, ‘Abdullaah bin Salfeeq adh-Dhufairee, presented to me a treatise he wrote on the guidelines that a student of knowledge should abide by. I held it to be an excellent treatise in which he successfully compiled the guidelines that are required for a student of knowledge as well as their proofs from the Book and the Sunnah.

In summary, he has done a great job and produced a work of benefit. So may Allaah reward him with good, bless him and grant us more people like him. Lastly, I encourage the students of knowledge to memorize and study these guidelines. And with Allaah lies the success.

Written by:
Ahmad bin Yahyaa An-Najmee
4/27/1421H

Introduction of the Author

All praise is for Allaah and may the peace and blessings be on the Messenger of Allaah.

To proceed:

These are some brief words clarifying the most important foundations that a person must abide by in his search for knowledge, which I present as an advice and reminder to myself and my brothers. This is since whoever yearns to seek knowledge and desires to acquire it, he should abide by the following ten guidelines and principles:

First: Seeking Allaah's Assistance

A person is weak – he has no motion or power except by Allaah's leave. If he entrusts things to himself, he will fall into ruin and perdition. But if he entrusts his affairs to Allaah and seeks His assistance in seeking knowledge, Allaah will aid him. Allaah has incited us towards this in His noble Book, as He says:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

"You alone do we worship and in You alone do we seek assistance." [Surah Al-Faatihah: 5]

And He says:

وَمَن يَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَىاللَّهِ فَهُوَ حَسْبُهُ

"And whoever puts his trust in Allaah, then He is sufficient for him." [Surah At-Talaaq: 3]

And He says:

وَعَلَى اللّهِ فَتَوَكَّلُواْ إِن كُنتُم مُّؤْمِنِينَ

"And upon Allaah put your trust if you are truly believers." [Surah Al-Maa'idah: 23]

The Prophet ﷺ said: **"If you were to put your reliance upon Allaah the way you ought to, He would surely provide for you just as He provides for the birds – they set out with empty stomachs and return with their stomachs full."**

The greatest sustenance that Allaah can provide us with is knowledge. Our prophet Muhammad ﷺ would always put his reliance in Allaah and seek His assistance in all of his affairs. It is authentically reported that the Prophet ﷺ would supplicate when going outside, saying: **"In the Name of Allaah, I put my trust in Allaah, and there is no might or power except by Allaah's Leave."** This proves what we stated above that he ﷺ would always put his trust in Allaah.

Second: Good Intention

A person should make his intention for the sake of Allaah when seeking knowledge, thus doing that purely for His sake alone and not desiring to be heard or to become famous, nor seeking one of the worldly goals.

Whoever makes his intention for the sake of Allaah, Allaah will grant him success in that matter and reward him. This is since knowledge is a form of worship. In fact, it is the greatest form of worship.

An individual is not rewarded for his deed unless he performs it purely for Allaah's sake and whilst following the Messenger ﷺ in that matter. Allaah says:

إِنَّ اللّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَواْ وَّالَّذِينَ هُم مُّحْسِنُونَ

"Verily, Allaah is with those who are dutiful (*Taqwaa*) to Him and those who are good-doers." [Surah An-Nahl: 128]

The greatest form of dutifulness (*Taqwaa*) to Allaah is making one's intention purely for the sake of Allaah. As for the one who seeks knowledge for the sake of showing off, then apart from being a loser in this world, he will also be punished for this in the Hereafter as has been reported in the hadeeth about the three people who will be dragged on their faces into Hell, amongst whom will be a man who sought knowledge so that it could be said: **"He is a scholar"** and such was said about him.

Third: Humbling Oneself before Allaah and Asking Him for Success and Prosperity

One should also ask his Lord to increase him in seeking knowledge, since an individual is destitute and in the utmost need of Allaah. This is why Allaah has encouraged His servants to ask of Him and to lower themselves before Him, as He says:

وَقَالَ رَبُّكُمُ ادْعُونِي أَسْتَجِبْ لَكُمْ

"Call unto Me, I will respond to you." [Surah Ghaafir: 60]

And the Prophet ﷺ said: **"Our Lord descends every night to the lowest level of heaven and says: 'Who is calling Me that I may respond? Who asks of Me that I may give him? Who seeks My forgiveness that I may forgive him?'"**

Allaah commanded His Prophet to ask Him for an increase in knowledge, as He said:

وَقُل رَّبِّ زِدْنِي عِلْمًا

"And say: 'My Lord! Increase me in knowledge.'" [Surah TaHa: 114]

And Allaah said speaking on behalf of Ibraaheem:

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي حُكْمًا وَأَلْحِقْنِي بِالصَّالِحِينَ

"My Lord! Bestow *Hukm* (i.e. knowledge) on me, and join me with the righteous." [Surah Ash-Shua'raa: 83]

The word *Hukm* refers to knowledge, as the Prophet ﷺ said: **"If the Haakim (judge), strives hard performing Ijtihaad…"**

The Prophet ﷺ supplicated for Abu Hurairah ؓ to be granted the ability to memorize. He ﷺ also supplicated for Ibn 'Abbaas to be granted knowledge, as he said: **"O Allaah, give him understanding of the Religion, and teach him the *ta'weel* (interpretation of the Qur'aan)."**

Allaah answered His Prophet's supplication, such that afterward Abu Hurairah ؓ didn't hear anything except that he memorized it and Ibn 'Abbaas ؓ came to be the scholar of the ummah and the interpreter of the Qur'aan.

The scholars have continued to carry on this practice, thus lowering themselves before Allaah and asking Him to grant them knowledge. Look at the example of Shaikh-ul-Islaam Ibn Taimiyyah, may Allaah have mercy on him – He would go to the masaajid, prostrate to Allaah and supplicate to Him, saying: "O teacher of Ibraaheem, teach me! O educator of Sulaymaan, grant me understanding!"

And Allaah answered his supplication, such that Ibn Daqeeq-ul-'Eid said about him: "Allaah gathered the knowledge for him to the point that it was as if it (i.e. the knowledge) was between his eyes and he would take what he wished from it and leave off what he wished from it."

Fourth: An Upright Heart

The heart is the container where knowledge is stored. If the container is firm, it will store and protect what is placed in it, and if the container is damaged, it will lose what is placed in it.

The Messenger of Allaah ﷺ made the heart the foundation of everything, as he said: **"Verily, there is a morsel of flesh in the body that if it is correct, the entire body will be correct, and if it is corrupt, the entire body will be corrupt. Indeed, it is the heart."**

An upright heart comes about through awareness of Allaah and knowledge of His Names, Attributes and Actions. It also comes about by way of reflecting on His signs and creations, and by pondering on the Qur'aan. An upright heart also comes about due to one constantly prostrating (in prayer) and frequently observing the night prayer.

One should also avoid the things that corrupt and sicken the heart, since if these things are present in the heart, it will not be able to carry the knowledge. And even if the heart does carry it, it will not be understood, as Allaah says about the hypocrites – those with diseased hearts:

لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لاَّ يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا

"They have heart with which they do not comprehend." [Surah Al-A'raaf: 179]

The diseases of the heart are of two types: Desires and Doubts

Desires are such as love for this worldly life and its pleasures and being preoccupied with that; love for unlawful images; listening to unlawful things such as musical voices and instruments; and looking at the forbidden.

Doubts are such as corrupt beliefs; innovated actions; and ascribing to innovated ideological movements.

Some other diseases of the heart that also serve as obstacles before knowledge are: jealousy, spite and pride.

Some other things that corrupt the heart are: excessive sleep, excessive speech and excessive eating.

Therefore, one should avoid these diseases and corruptors in order to rectify the heart and make it upright.

Fifth: Intelligence

Intelligence may be natural and it may also be acquired. So if a person is naturally intelligent, he should work towards strengthening it. And if he is not, then he should condition himself until he is able to acquire it.

Human aptitude is one of the strongest methods that assist one in obtaining, understanding and memorizing knowledge. It also aids one in differentiating between the various (Fiqh) issues, gathering evidences and other matters.

Sixth: Having a Strong Desire to Obtain Knowledge is a Cause for Acquiring it and for Gaining Allaah's Assistance in that Matter

Allaah says:

إِنَّ اللّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَواْ وَّالَّذِينَ هُم مُّحْسِنُونَ

"Verily, Allaah is with those who are dutiful to Him and those who are good-doers." [Surah An-Nahl: 128]

When a person realizes the importance of something, he strives hard to obtain it. Knowledge is the greatest thing that a person could hope to obtain.

So it is upon the student of knowledge to have a strong desire for memorizing and understanding knowledge, and for sitting with the scholars and taking from them. He should also be keen on doing a lot of reading and taking advantage of his life and free time. So this means he should be very stingy with his time (i.e. only use it for beneficial things).

Seventh: Seriousness, Motivation and Perseverance for Acquiring Knowledge

One should remain far away from laziness and apathy, and he should fight against his desires and the Devil. This is since Desires and the Devil are two things that impede one from seeking knowledge.

One of the ways that help in motivating a person to seek knowledge is: Reading the biographies of the scholars, as well as their patience and endurance in the face of trials. This also includes reading about the journeys they undertook for the sake of acquiring knowledge and obtaining Hadeeth.

Eighth: Proficiency

This is when the student applies the highest extent of his effort to the point that he achieves what he desires from knowledge as well as strength in it, which is exemplified in: memorization and understanding.

Ninth: Accompanying a Teacher

Knowledge should be taken from the mouths of the scholars. In order for the student to establish himself in his search for knowledge upon a firm and correct pillar, he should sit in the gatherings of the scholars and take knowledge from them. This will ensure that his search for knowledge will be founded upon correct principles and it will ensure that he will pronounce the texts from the Qur'aan and Hadeeth with a correct pronunciation, which contains no grammatical errors or reading mistakes. It will also ensure that he will understand the material correctly.

Apart from all of this, the student may also acquire the following from sitting with a scholar: Good behavior, noble manners and piety.

The student should also avoid having books become his teacher. This is since whoever's books is his teacher, he will err frequently and seldom be correct.

This matter has not ceased to exist up until this day of ours. There is not a man that excels and become proficient in knowledge except that he has been educated and taught at the hands of a scholar.

Tenth: The Passage of Time

The student of knowledge should not think that his studies will be completed in a day or two or a year or two. Rather, a student of knowledge needs to be patient for many years.

Al-Qaadee 'Iyaad, may Allaah have mercy on him, was once asked: "Until when should a student seek knowledge?"

He replied: "Until he dies, at which point his inkwell should be spilled upon his grave."

And Imaam Ahmad said: "I sat studying the Book of Menstruation for nine years until I understood it."

The intelligent students of knowledge should not stop sitting with the scholars after ten years have passed nor even after twenty years have passed. Rather, they should continue to sit with the scholars until Allaah takes their souls in death.

These are some of the guidelines that the student of knowledge should adhere to in order to properly acquire knowledge.

I ask Allaah to bless me and you with beneficial knowledge and righteous deeds.

May the peace and blessings be on our prophet Muhammad, his family, Companions and those who followed their example in goodness until the Day of Resurrection.

[End of Treatise]